

VZCZCXRO9108
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV
DE RUEHPG #0803/01 1951231
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 141231Z JUL 06
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7646
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 PRAGUE 000803

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
NOFORN

EUR/NCE FOR FICHTE, PM/RSAT FOR DOWLEY, OSD/ISP FOR
SADOWSKA, OSD/FP FOR MINATELLI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/14/2016

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [EZ](#)

SUBJECT: CZECHS: WE ARE LIKELY TO OFFER A BASE, WITH NO
STRINGS ATTACHED

REF: A. PRAGUE 771

[1](#)B. PRAGUE 757

Classified By: Ambassador William Cabaniss
for reasons 1.4 (b) + (d).

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary and comment: Czech Deputy FM Pojar and his Political Director briefed the Ambassador July 13 on their strategy to manage political and public opinion regarding the possible basing of a U.S. missile defense (MD) site in the Czech Republic. They stressed that the GOCR would not/not make any kind of quid-pro-quo requests for hosting an MD site. Based on his consultations with key politicians from all major parties during the ongoing negotiations on the formation of a new government, Pojar said that all the likely security policy leaders favored continued discussions with the USG. Pojar said he was confident that the Czech Republic, if selected to host a base, could secure the necessary Parliamentary approval. Pojar is engaging in a sophisticated public relations campaign, leveraging supporters of MD from across Czech society. Pojar also asked the Embassy to engage with certain Czech politicians to dispel some of the myths surrounding MD and to highlight the benefits to both the Czech Republic and to Europe that such cooperation would entail. Surveys of the Czech candidate sites for a base begin July 18. Pojar thinks that if the Czechs are found to have a desirable site, high-level discussions between the U.S. and the Czech Republic should follow immediately upon formation of a new government, something he thinks is possible within the next month. We believe that this timetable for discussions with the U.S. is flexible. Despite the lack of a formed government, the pro-MD leadership currently running the ministries will likely be receptive to earlier political meetings if the U.S. schedule requires it. End summary and comment.

[1](#)2. (S/NF) The Ambassador met July 13 with Czech Deputy FM Thomas Pojar and MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil at their invitation to discuss the next political steps on the Czech Republic's candidacy to host a U.S. missile defense site. The Ambassador expressed his appreciation for the Czechs, willingness to compete to host an MD site and offered to work together to achieve the best possible result. In response to Czech questions about the timeline for MD decision-making in the U.S., poloff explained that a decision on candidate MD sites would most likely be taken in late August or early September. At that time, in addition to considering the technical merits of each site, the USG would have to assess the political viability of basing a site in the Czech Republic. While a full vote of Parliament delivering final legal authority would not/not be necessary

by that time, the predicted political viability of the Czech candidacy would be a significant factor.

The Political Strategy:
Reach out to both friends and skeptics

¶3. (S/NF) Pojar believed that while challenges remain, an eventual political &yes8 to MD in the Czech Republic was a strong likelihood. Faced with uncertainty as to who would be decision makers on MD in the future government (ref A), Pojar had canvassed the likely future leaders. They all support further work with the USG on possible basing of a MD site in the Czech Republic. Recent debate on the issue in the media had revealed significant levels of support for the project within the Czech political leadership and with opinion-makers. However, ensuring a positive answer in the Parliament would require further engagement with politicians who are currently skeptical about MD. The Ambassador agreed that the Embassy would engage with key parliamentarians to answer their concerns.

¶4. (S/NF) Pojar stressed that the GOCR would not/not make requests of the United States in any kind of quid-pro-quo exchange for hosting an MD site. However, he did warn that, during public and parliamentary debate on the issue, some players would continue to publicly call for such linkages as including the Czech Republic in the Visa Waiver Program. While the United States should not view such calls as indicative of the GOCR position, Pojar believes addressing such non-related issues could only benefit management of the public debate on MD.

PRAGUE 00000803 002 OF 003

Framing MD for Czech/European Audience

¶5. (S/NF) Pojar said the political process would require a discussion on the nature of the relationship between the United States and its Czech ally. He advised that framing MD from the following perspective would be especially helpful in managing the political dynamic and public debate:

¶6. (S/NF) One, MD is a transatlantic issue. A political focus on MD as an isolated issue, without references to overall context, would cause problems. Better results would come from an American and Czech approach that portrayed MD in the wider context of the Euro-Atlantic relationship, and the place of the Czech Republic in the international security community. Pojar believed that careful handling of the issue would help all concerned remember the benefits for the Czech Republic and for Europe as a whole.

¶7. (S/NF) Two, MD has direct economic benefits to the Czech Republic. Pojar stressed that the Social Democrats (the second largest party), which currently does not have a defined position on MD, would be especially receptive to the economic arguments of MD. (Note: CSSD are not necessarily opposed to MD. It was a CSSD-led coalition government that originally expressed Czech interest in hosting a U.S. missile defense base. End note) Specifically, information such as employment gains, size of accompanying investment in the Czech Republic, and local procurement prospects, would resonate with the public and with parliamentarians caught up in the populist side of MD benefits.

¶8. (S/NF) Three, MD would not weaken NATO. Povejsil pointed out that most Czech supporters of the MD concept believed strongly in transatlantic security cooperation. He said this core group of supporters is susceptible to allegations that a U.S. MD system would be part of an overall reduction in the United States, commitment to NATO. He said that clarification on the U.S.

system,s potential synergies with a NATO system would be very helpful. Some Czechs, he said, feared that the U.S. might reduce its overall enthusiasm for NATO in the long term. Supporters of MD would welcome statements that countered that impression.

¶9. (S/NF) Four, MD is not aimed at Russia. Turning to the issue of the Czech President Vaclav Klaus, Pojar shared that he did not expect significant opposition, but the matter would have to be handled carefully. Klaus was particularly sensitive on matters of national sovereignty, and on inflaming Russia. However, Klaus was also deeply committed to the transatlantic security relationship, particularly as a balance to Brussels. Povejsil thought Klaus, concerns about Russia might be met if given better information on the purely defensive nature of the proposed MD site. (Note: Pojar believed that Klaus, who cherishes the prestige of official travel, would be very susceptible to suggestions from U.S. leaders during his regular visits to the United States.)

¶10. (S/NF) Pojar also believed expressions of positive international opinion could have significant influence in the Czech Republic. Neighboring countries attitudes to the project were unknown to the Czech populace. If such attitudes were positive, that could reassure some skeptics that important bilateral relationships would not be negatively influenced by the presence of a base. Such opinion could also be useful in countering the inevitable Russian complaints and propaganda.

The Public Diplomacy Strategy:
Answer the critics

¶11. (S/NF) Pojar claimed that problematic issues in the recent media debate on MD reflected a public diplomacy challenge, rather than any real policy differences between the U.S. and the Czech Republic. Pojar shared that the Czech experience in successfully handling public opinion on the eve of the Iraq war was also proving useful for missile defense. He and Povejsil had put considerable time into developing and managing a strategy to influence the public debate. They had ensured the few outrageous statements on MD in the press were met with carefully crafted opinion pieces arguing in favor of the project. Pojar and Povejsil shared that they will host a July 14 meeting with the leaders of think tanks and NGOs,

PRAGUE 00000803 003 OF 003

which support MD for the Czech Republic. The meeting will examine where the difficult issues might lie, and coordinate how non-government opinion-makers will write positively on MD (Note: Pojar won his appointment to become Deputy FM as a result of his long successful experience in working in this pro-U.S. NGO community. End note). Pojar also shared that, during the course of his other duties, he had already conferred with Romanian officials on their management of domestic political opinion when offering the U.S. military basing rights in the country.

When is the time for high-level political negotiations?

¶12. (S/NF) Povejsil explained that the best time for high-level political engagement by U.S. officials would be in the first days of a new Czech government. Pojar agreed that a high-level U.S. visit to Prague in advance of the formation of a new government could be less than ideal if the Czech side of the table might have to leave their jobs within days or weeks. Both Povejsil and Pojar said that, should high-level political negotiations become necessary in advance of the formation of a government, they were ready to fly to Washington themselves at short notice (Note: Pojar shared that under most scenarios he would remain in his job at the Foreign Ministry and wouldbe a likely point of continuity on

the MD issue. End note).

Comment

¶13. (S/NF) Pojar, Povejsil and their pro-MD allies have done major work in crafting a strategy to get the Czech Republic to "yes," even when faced with the additional hurdle of dealing with the uncertainty of ongoing negotiations on the shape of the next government. There are signs that that their public affairs strategy is working better than originally expected, and public nature of the debate on MD has morphed in to one of the strengths of the Czech hope to host a U.S. base.

¶14. (S/NF) Success is by no means guaranteed. Pragmatism continues to rule. While it appears that a majority of Czech politicians, if voting their conscience, could support a U.S. base in the Czech Republic, none of them would give up their chance of forming a government in a principled stand either for or against a base. However, the ongoing negotiations on a government are slowly inching towards some kind of accommodation between the two largest parties. That scenario would eliminate the influence of smaller parties such as KDU-CSL which harbors some strong MD skeptics, and the Communists and Greens, who oppose. Post intends to discuss the missile defense program with several prominent Czech parliamentarians in the coming days.

¶15. (S/NF) Pojar suggested that the time for to implement a more aggressive political action plan on missile defense would come immediately following a decision by the U.S. that a Czech site looked like the best candidate in the region. Technical site surveys begin July 18. Their findings may lead to a flurry of enthusiastic organized political activity in Prague.
CABANISS